

SocietyGuardian Environment

Sardine Man, who campaigns against overcrowded trains, is one of the pet causes funded by Lush chief executive Mark Constantine



Guerrilla giveaway

Green activists have been among the biggest winners in a cash windfall from the car-hating founder of cosmetics company Lush

Bibi van der Zee

One morning in January this year, it was suddenly Christmas again. A dozen tiny campaign groups around the country, used to having to empty their own wallets for stamps and photocopying, awoke to find letters from the cosmetics company Lush. A few days later, cheques for £1,000 followed. Emails immediately began being exchanged: "Are these guys for real?"

"It was amazing," says Julie Wright, who runs the No Widening the M1 campaign in Sheffield, and received £1,000. John Stewart, chairman of Hacan Clear Skies, campaigning against Heathrow air-pollution, says: "Normally, we live off fresh air and goodwill. It's not the normal way things happen."

So why the sudden windfalls? Rebecca Lush (no relation), who runs the campaign group Roadblock, part of Transport 2000, says she got a call early last year from a former Twyford Downs comrade, now working for Lush Cosmetics who told her that the company wanted to improve its green profile and hoped she would give it some advice.

Lush says: "I went along and they gave me a tour of the factory. I was really impressed: there were only a couple of things I wanted to suggest, but most of them I'd already thought of and were experimenting with."

The company wanted to give money to groups that would do something interesting with the cash, and tapped up Lush for a list of small grassroots groups - particularly anti-roads or anti-airport organisations (Lush chief executive Mark Constantine is a passionate cyclist and "hates all that road building").

But how do these small groups normally get by financially? Seeds for Change, a group that facilitates direct action, has some useful information on its website that gives some suggestions: pub collections, bucket rattling and "going to work". It suggests: "Rather than spending 20 hours working on a mad scheme to get money, it's sometimes better to just go and work in a pub collecting glasses for 20 hours." Other techniques include raffles, jumble sales, or benefit parties and gigs.

Dump the Dump, a campaign against an

incinerator being built next to an infant school in Brighton, used the time-honoured whip-round technique, and managed, between all its members, to raise a couple of thousand pounds, part of which it is using to put up three independent candidates in the local elections in May.

Carol Barbone, the campaign director of Stop Stansied Expansion, says its annual calendar, which features pictures of landscapes that will be devastated if the proposed airport expansion goes ahead, now pulls in £30,000 a year.

Generous donors, however, are harder to come by. At Schneus, the weekly direct action newsletter, they have never heard of a company handing out money like this. Its donors tend to be anonymous. Rebecca Lush, who is working on a book about how to campaign, says: "This sort of thing - what Lush is doing - just doesn't happen."

Back in the 1990s, campaigners lived off the dole, or their parents, or, of course, their inheritance. And although there are now groups that favour giving to smaller campaigns, such as the Manuka Club founded by venture philanthropist Benjamin Goldsmith, the establishment, on the whole, sticks with the big charities.

Most campaigners point out that it is getting harder, not easier to get money to trickle their way. A spokesman at Seeds for Change says funds such as the national lottery's Awards for All, which in the 90s was quite relaxed about giving out money, are increasingly concerned about liability and health and safety regulations.

"We've heard of cases where local community groups and charities are being told unofficially by big funders - such as Comic Relief - that they have no chance of receiving any support. Small charities are seen as being inefficient and too risky in a risk averse political climate. Yet those of us who work with community groups know that the smaller, grassroots groups achieve incredible results on a shoestring."

And this is precisely why Constantine is handing money out to these groups.

"My son and one of the buyers went out to Thailand after the tsunami and it was pretty horrific," he explains. "They saw all the wasted money, all the schools bought for children that weren't alive, boats that will never sail, houses

for people that don't exist, a general waste of all the money that everyone chucked in. And that's why we're so specific, that's why I asked Rebecca to get the activists on board. We could give a hundred grand to the Prince's Trust (who we like very much) or we could give that in one grand lots to people stopping climate change. Frankly, that sounds more fun."

Is it a good idea, in business terms, to ally yourself with activists, when parts of the UK media can get twitchy at the words "direct action"? And Constantine concedes that "some people might think we're funding animal activists with clubs to hit people."

Constantine was a key member of the Body Shop empire until he left in a clash over ethics, and still appears a little aggrieved that, due to the sale of the Body Shop to L'Oréal, he now has to (as he explained in a Guardian interview last week) make sure "that the public has a choice ... I think there is a desperate need for people to understand there are alternatives."

He is clearly not going to let himself get too responsible, however. He explains his primary reason for picking grassroots groups to receive the money. "If you're going to give money away you might as well give it to someone who's going to do something stupid with it." His favourites among the groups are Sardine Man, who travels the country highlighting congestion problems, or the Guerrilla Gardeners, who plant flowers on ugly traffic islands in the dead of the night. In that spirit he's also created the Charity Pot, a hand lotion from which all the proceeds, save the VAT, will be going to more of these small grassroots groups.

"I hate cars. I really hate them, but I'd been giving up the ghost, until Rebecca came along and we started all this up," says Constantine. "It's really rekindled my bloodymindedness. When you think about it, you think how much mischief you can do with a thousand here, a thousand there, it's great. If we get a million out of the Charity Pot, we could create absolute chaos."

His face lights up and he starts to laugh. "They won't be able to get a digger to move across the whole of Britain!"

Mark Constantine has been getting activists in a rather





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Revealed: Britain's 10 most overcrowded trains

Staff and agencies, Guardian Unlimited Monday, March 26 2007



Commuters attempt to board an overcrowded train at Blackfriars station, London. Photograph: Guardian/Linda Nylind

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- 7:31am Barnsley to Leeds service, 57% overcapacity;
- 7:14am Sheffield to Leeds train, 53% overcapacity;
- 4:33pm Sutton to Luton service, 50% overcapacity;
- 7:26am Northampton to Birmingham New Street, 45% overcapacity.

Julia Thomas, Transport 2000's public transport campaigner, said poor government planning was as much to blame for the overcrowded conditions as the rail operators.

She said: "It's very easy to blame rail operators for overcrowding problems, but actually a lot of it is down to the government's rail policy.

"They have issued 'no growth' franchises for the past 10 years and they've been promoting a policy of fares hikes to get people to travel off-peak, but passengers really don't have that much flexibility. In addition, the very short time periods covered by franchise agreements do not encourage any infrastructure investment by the rail operators."

Earlier this month the government announced it would buy 1,000 extra train carriages between 2009 and 2014 to ease sardine-like conditions on the worst affected routes. But the new carriages will not be available until near the end of the decade at the earliest, despite expectations that train usage will rise by 30% by 2020.

A Department for Transport spokesman today said "the first of the new trains will be put into use as soon as possible on the busiest parts of the network".

A survey by the rail watchdog Passenger Focus earlier this year found that only 60% of rail users believe there is sufficient room for the passengers to sit or stand. The poll highlighted growing discontent over train capacity with a smaller proportion of respondents saying there was enough room on carriages than in the previous survey.

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Environmental campaigners today revealed the 10 most overcrowded trains in Britain, putting the 7:59am Durham to Newcastle service in at the number one slot.

The train operates at up to 88% overcapacity, closely followed by the 7:18am Cambridge to London Liverpool Street service and the 7:53am from Ecclestone Park to Liverpool Lime Street at 85% overcapacity, according to Transport 2000.

Transport 2000 will collect evidence from the 10 routes over the next two weeks to present to the transport secretary, Douglas Alexander, before the government's rail strategy report expected to be published this summer.

The government wants more people to use public transport as part of its strategy to tackle climate change but the survey shows many services are struggling to cope with existing passenger numbers.

The other services in the top 10 are:

- 5:21pm Cardiff to Maesteg, 78% overcapacity;
- 8:14am Humphrey Park to Manchester Oxford Road, 75% overcapacity;
- 8am Morpeth to Newcastle service, 58% overcapacity;



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Monday March 26 2007

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Commuter train or cattle truck?

By Georgia Brown / News 01:02pm



Pushing in: commuters attempt to board an overcrowded train at Blackheath station in London. Photograph: Guardian/Linda Nylind

Environmental campaigners today revealed Britain's 10 most overcrowded trains, with the 7.59am Durham to Newcastle service winning the cattle-service crown.

This train runs at a crushing 88% overcapacity and it's a similar story across the country with commuters packed on to trains often running at over 50% overcapacity, according to Transport 2000, whose "Sardine Man" will travel on the country's most congested routes and present his collected evidence to the transport minister, Douglas Alexander.

To long-suffering passengers this will hardly come a shock. Commuters are sick of standing up like sardines on overcrowded trains and paying higher and higher prices for the privilege.

The situation is set to get worse with traffic predicted to grow by 30% by 2020 and the government's 1000 new train carriages not set to come into service until at least the end of the decade.

We are encouraged to leave our cars at home, but many passengers feel trains are becoming an increasingly unattractive alternative. Should we just grimace into our fellow commuter's armpit and bear it?

Comments

What do you expect? Privatisation meant that bean-counters took over from railway professionals. The line is over capacity? Well, you can't run relief trains now, can you? They were very common in the bad old days. Sure, there was a lot of under-used stock sitting in sidings then, but railways were at the same time able to adapt to changing conditions more quickly because they were....nationalised. Funny, that dirty word is becoming more attractive recently.

Posted by toubib on March 26, 2007 2:03 PM.

Offensive? Unsuitable? Report this comment.

It's too little, too late. Commuters now live in greater suburbia which once was the country and villages visited on weekends. Between then and now, rail lines have been shut, the farm sold, business decentralised, motorways badly designed while politicians have had their heads up...

Nowadays it seems that one half of the population is going to work where the other half live and vice versa.

Posted by oilstromoz on March 26, 2007 2:16 PM.

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So we get the extra carriages we need today in 5-10 years time. When will we get the expanded network capacity we'll be needing in 5-10 years time? 20 years? 30 years? Every other nation in western Europe is laying new railway lines, so why aren't we? Can anyone look at those trains and honestly say it wouldn't be a good investment? Futhermore lets find out what Eddington "really" had to say about high speed rail in the draft, not the re-draft, of his report.

Posted by Parkey on March 26, 2007 2:52 PM.

Offensive? Unsuitable? Report this comment.

While things on the continent aren't as bad, the morning commute is not for the faint-hearted. Here is a commuting survival guide:

Commuting for dummies

<http://blog.myspace.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=blog.view&friendID=DiabolicAldea> on March 26, 2007 3:21 PM.

Offensive? Unsuitable? Report this comment.

Let's be clear about this. Public transport, especially rail, is a failure of this Government. They could have sorted it in the last ten years but they didn't. It didn't warrant sufficient priority. Now we have a railway system that is a European joke and the growing disincentive to use a train is leading to more and more traffic congestion and carbon.

How about someone from one of the terrible rail companies contributing to this?

Posted by Bobjob21 on March 26, 2007 3:32 PM.

Offensive? Unsuitable? Report this comment.

The 07:59 from Durham isn't really a commuters' local service: it's the 05:39 TransPennine express from Manchester Piccadilly to Newcastle. If it wasn't full for most of that route, it probably wouldn't be running.

There are only four stations on the East Coast Main Line between the Tees and the Tyne - Darlington, Durham, Chester-le-Street and Newcastle. As long-distance trains run over that section all day from dawn to midnight, it's little wonder that those that cover the morning and evening County Durham rush-hours are badly overcrowded.

And extra trains wouldn't be an easy solution: there are few places where inter-city expresses could pass the 'slow' trains. Unless extra tracks were built....!

Posted by malcarr on March 26, 2007 8:12 PM.

Offensive? Unsuitable? Report this comment.

This is the sort of environmental campaigning I like to see and fully endorse.

Identify the solutions, and where they are not working get them sorted first.

All it needs now is to get from a minor blog post to a mainstream voting issue.

Commuter train or cattle truck? from Guardian Unlimited: Travelog

(Sound of breath being held).

Posted by JunkkMale on March 27, 2007 1:08 PM.

Offensive? Unsuitable? Report this comment.

This is the sort of environmental campaigning I like to see and fully endorse.

Identify the solutions, and where they are not working get them sorted first.

All it needs now is to get from a minor blog post to a mainstream voting issue.

(Sound of breath being held).

Posted by JunkkMale on March 27, 2007 1:09 PM.

Offensive? Unsuitable? Report this comment.

I wouldn't say that rail services are a failure of this government. We have the most modern fleet of trains in Europe which are more punctual than they have been in decades. Things have gotten a lot better over the last 10 years. It's fairer to say that they have been a victim of their own success, as well as increase in road congestion.

The failure of this government is the way in which the treasury prevents the progression of any large projects that would address the issue and bring huge long-term gains. Crossrail has been held back for years. Birmingham New Street still looks like a multi storey car park. Most importantly though, the high speed lines recommended by independent studies, national rail, and the DfT that would relieve demand and give space for more local services on existing lines as well as competing with domestic flights aren't even being seriously being considered.

I agree that transport policy should be a major issue in the next election.

Posted by Parkey on March 28, 2007 1:07 PM.

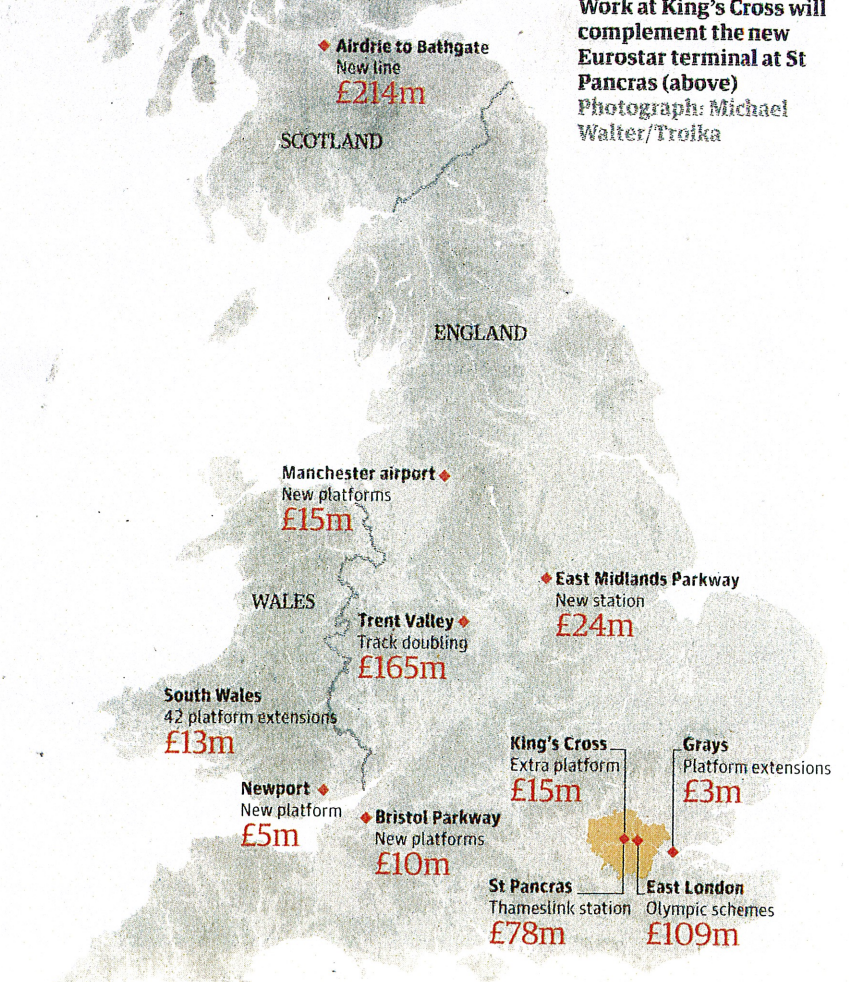
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£2.4bn worth of improvements

Mark Milner



Infrastructure and enhancement projects



Work at King's Cross will complement the new Eurostar terminal at St Pancras (above)
Photograph: Michael Walter/Troika

Network Rail is to spend £2.4bn over the next two years expanding Britain's railways – the biggest outlay since before privatisation – to ease overcrowding.

Hundreds of platforms will be extended and new ones built, new track laid, speed limits raised and capacity added through signalling schemes, John Armitt, Network Rail chief executive, said yesterday.

Network Rail said it would spend £5.3bn this year on infrastructure including almost £2.8bn on renewals, just over £1bn on maintenance, £368m on the west coast mainline and almost £1.1bn on expanding capacity. "For the first time on record, over £1bn per year will be spent on expanding and growing the railway network," Mr Armitt said. Spending over the past 12 years has averaged around £500m a year, according to Network Rail. British Rail did not keep figures before privatisation.

The rail industry has been under pressure to reduce overcrowding, with passengers complaining about paying higher fares while facing cramped conditions. The government has pledged another 1,000 carriages and the 900 projects budgeted for the next two years' enhancement spending include extended platforms for longer trains, to be in service from 2009.

Other schemes include a £214m new line from Airdrie to Bathgate in Scotland; new platforms at Bristol Parkway, Manchester Airport, Newport and King's Cross, and £109m to prepare for the 2012 Olympics. Overall, Network Rail plans to spend £400m on Olympic rail links.

Plans include thousands more car parking spaces for park-and-ride commuters. Network Rail said it would fund £1.73bn of the enhancements, with the remainder from the Department for Transport, Transport Scotland, the Welsh Assembly, passenger transport executives, councils, and port, freight and train operators.

Anthony Smith, chief executive of Passenger Focus, said: "At last we have broken free from simply maintaining and replacing track and signals and are moving towards expanding the network." Transport 2000, which has been running a "sardine man" campaign to highlight overcrowding, said that although the programme did not represent new money, "for the first time in decades there will be new platforms built, platform extensions, and station and track upgrades".

Bob Crow, general secretary of the RMT, said the programme was "a good start towards the massive increase in capacity that our railways need if we are to meet the climate challenge and get people out of cars and aeroplanes and on to trains".

However, Chris Grayling, the shadow transport secretary, said the schemes had already been announced and some were near completion. "It is disingenuous to claim the company is embarking on a major new plan of activity in this way."

Mr Armitt said the separate £3.6bn Thameslink upgrade and other large projects remained under development.

GUARDIAN
15/03/07

National

Rail users face years of price rises to pay for solutions to overcrowding

£1bn earmarked to buy 1,000 more carriages

Industry insiders say urgent action needed

Dan Milmo
Transport correspondent

Rail passengers face annual inflation-busting fare rises into the next decade after the government announced a £1bn investment in carriages to ease overcrowding. A passenger watchdog said yesterday it expected season ticket prices to rise by at least 1% above inflation for the foreseeable future to fund the expansion of the overloaded rail network.

Douglas Alexander, the transport secretary, said the government would buy 1,000 extra train carriages between 2009 and 2014 to ease sardine-like conditions on the worst affected routes.

Farepayers contributed £4.8bn to the upkeep of the rail network last year amid mounting passenger anger over ticket costs and lack of seating. Yesterday they were warned that the solution to overcrowding would come at a price.

The rail watchdog Passenger Focus said that commuters' pockets would have to deepen to recoup expenditure on new carriages, longer platforms and other infrastructure improvements to accommodate rising passenger numbers.

Asked if the price regime of RPI plus 1% would stay in place, Anthony Smith, chief executive of Passenger Focus, said: "That

will be the minimum ... Over time the RPI plus 1% pricing does build up into quite significant increases. We are still worried that the price increases we are seeing are excluding people from the railway."

Mr Alexander said that investment in lengthening station platforms and other infrastructure schemes would be announced in the summer when the Department for Transport published a five-year plan for the rail network alongside details of the routes getting new carriages, with London and the south-east the most obvious candidates.

Speaking at a rail conference in London, he said: "Money will still have to be accounted for and our budget will remain tight. Our immediate challenge is to tackle capacity to meet future demand. These new carriages are an important first step."

The carriages will be funded out of the DfT rail budget, but the government will expect to recoup the cost from train operators as rising passenger numbers and fares boost their revenues. Network Rail, the company that owns and maintains the rail system, will also pass infrastructure costs on to operators – and ultimately farepayers – via track access charges.

Rail industry insiders attacked the delay in introducing new carriages, not to be available until near the end of the decade

The expected rise in train journeys by 2020. The planned investment may not be enough, the industry warns

30%

at the earliest. Train leasing firms, which acquire carriages from manufacturers and lease them to train operators, believe at least 500 carriages are needed to address overcrowding problems immediately.

With train usage expected to grow by 30% up to 2020, yesterday's announcement might not be enough to accommodate passenger growth by 2014, industry sources said.

Julia Thomas, of the campaign group Transport 2000, warned that with passenger growth running at nearly 10% a year, the investment would not cut overcrowding on a rail network that accounted for 1.1bn passenger journeys last year.

Chris Grayling, the shadow transport secretary, said the announcement ignored the scale of the overcrowding, which had led to a passenger fare strike on First Great Western this year. "The key problem is that the government is saying there is an overcrowding crisis and there will be lots of new carriages, but not until 2014. It looks like a 'jam tomorrow' announcement."

Iain Coucher, deputy chief executive of Network Rail, suggested the government would back the £1bn carriage investment by spending many billions of pounds more on infrastructure. He said the government was prepared to release funds for a £3.5bn overhaul of the former Thameslink route, which runs from Brighton to Bedford via central London and is one of the most overcrowded routes on the network.

The Department for Transport is to outline its requirements for the rail network and the amount of money it is willing to commit in a statement this summer.

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Rail services '88% over capacity'

Some train routes in England and Wales are running at almost double capacity, according to new research.

The 0759 Durham to Newcastle service tops the list, sometimes operating at 88% above capacity, according to environmental group Transport 2000.

Also highlighted were the 0718 Cambridge to London and 0753 Eccleston Park to Liverpool Lime Street, both often at 85% over capacity.

The Department for Transport has said it will add 1,000 carriages by 2014.

Julia Thomas, Transport 2000's public transport campaigner, said: "It's very easy to blame rail operators for overcrowding problems, but actually a lot of it is down to the government's rail policy.

"They have issued 'no growth' franchises for the past 10 years and they've been promoting a policy of fare hikes to get people to travel off-peak, but passengers really don't have that much flexibility.

"In addition, the very short time periods covered by franchise agreements does not encourage any infrastructure investment by the rail operators."

The group said it is gathering evidence to send to Transport Secretary Douglas Alexander ahead of the government's expected major rail strategy report this summer.

A DfT spokesman said: "The government has acted and will continue to act to provide additional capacity.

"We've improved capacity in recent franchise contracts, and invested billions in major upgrades of the network.

"A fortnight ago we announced that we plan to add 1,000 extra carriages on the network - an increase of 10%. The first of the new trains will be put into use as soon as possible on the busiest parts of the network.

"And that is not the end of the story, as Transport 2000 are aware. Our rail strategy, to be published this



Rail passengers often have to stand on their daily commute

MOST OVERCROWDED ROUTES

- Durham to Newcastle (0759) - 88%
- Cambridge to London Liverpool Street (0718) - 85%
- Eccleston Park to Liverpool Lime Street (0753) - 85%
- Cardiff to Maesteg (1721) - 78%
- Humphrey Park to Manchester Oxford Road (0814) - 75%
- Morpeth to Newcastle (0800) - 58%
- Barnsley to Leeds (0731) - 57%
- Sheffield to Leeds (0714) - 53%
- Sutton to Luton (1644) - 50%
- Northampton to Birmingham New Street (0726) - 45%

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